THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS ADOLESCENT SURVEY

1987

PRELIMINARY REPORT

A survey conducted by the Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Research and Evaluation Branch of the Ministry of Health, B.C.

November 1987

Province of British Columbia
Ministry of Health
Alcohol and Drug Programs

Acknowledgements

Alcohol and Drug Programs recognizes the efforts made by individual school principals, teachers, and students to minimize the disruption caused by the administration of the survey questionnaire in a classroom situation. We would like to thank them, and also their Superintendents and Boards of Trustees whose cooperation made this study possible.

Alcohol and Drug Programs would also like to thank the Ministry of Health's Research and Evaluation Branch for the analysis of the survey and preparation of the Preliminary Report. Finally, we thank Alcohol and Drug Programs' Regional and Central Office staff who assisted in preparing the report for publication.

November, 1987

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main entry under title:
The British Columbia Alcohol and Drug Programs adolescent survey : 1987 preliminary report

ISBN 0-7726-0722-2

1. Youth - British Columbia - Alcohol use. 2. Youth - British Columbia - Drug use. 3. Drug abuse surveys - British Columbia. I. British Columbia. Alcohol and Drug Programs. II. British Columbia. Ministry of Health. Research and Evaluation Branch.

HV4999.Y68B74 1987 362.2'9'09711 C87-092194-0

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS ADOLESCENT SURVEY: 1987

PRELIMINARY REPORT

I. Introduction

Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP), Ministry of Health, is responsible for planning, funding, and coordinating prevention and treatment programs related to the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. ADP has conducted surveys of adolescent alcohol and other drug use in the Vancouver School District every four years from 1970 through 1982. The 1987 study is the first time that a survey has been conducted on a province-wide basis. It was initiated by ADP and conducted as a cooperative effort of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Ministry of Health's Research and Evaluation Branch. Data were collected in April and May of 1987. The results of the current study are not comparable to those in the previous series because of differences in study design.

II. Methodology

The survey questionnaire was based on guidelines for surveys of this type established by Health and Welfare Canada. It is similar to questionnaires used recently in several other provinces and consists of 62 questions (107 items) in a self-administered, multiple choice format. Participation in the survey was voluntary and those who filled out questionnaires were assured that they were doing so on an anonymous basis.

The survey was designed to obtain data that would be representative of British Columbia adolescents in grades 8 through 12 of the public school system. A stratified, modified multistage cluster design was employed in sample selection. The sample was sufficiently large to permit comparison among the five ADP regions (see map on page 11). A total of 615 classes from 151 schools throughout the province were surveyed. This resulted in a final sample of 14,712 adolescents: 7,365 males and 7,231 females (gender was not stated by 116 respondents).

III. Results

Major survey results are presented in three sections. The first section provides a summary of general findings. The second section presents survey results for individual drugs. The third section briefly examines the use of alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco by adolescents in British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick.

1. Summary

Alcohol was used by a higher proportion of British Columbia adolescents than any other drug studied. Three-quarters of those surveyed had used alcohol during the year preceding the survey. Substantial rates of use were also observed for cannabis, tobacco, hallucinogens, and prescription depressants.

There were no gender differences in terms of the percentages of males and females who had used alcohol during the past year. Males, however, were somewhat heavier drinkers than females, although differences in body weight should be taken into consideration. Males were also more likely to have demonstrated problem behaviour due to alcohol use.

A higher percentage of females than males used tobacco, but rates of utilization for most other drugs did not differ a great deal by gender.

Regional differences in the consumption of alcohol and other drugs were observed. No definitive regional patterns emerged, although the North region and the Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and Powell River region more frequently demonstrated higher rates of use than did the other three regions of the Province.

Substantial differences in most survey items by grade were apparent. For most drugs, the percentage of users and the amount consumed increased with grade. The greatest rate of increase in users of tobacco, alcohol, and cannabis occurred between grades 8 and 9. The use of glue and solvents, however, was highest among those in grade 8 and decreased with increasing grade. No consistent grade differences were observed in the use of non-prescription and prescription stimulants, tranquilizers, and barbiturates.

Alcohol was the easiest drug for British Columbia adolescents to obtain. While it was probably expected that a high percentage of grade 12 adolescents would find it "fairly easy" or "very easy" to get alcohol, it may be surprising that three-quarters of grade 8 adolescents also found alcohol relatively easy to obtain. Ease of access to most drugs increased with increasing grade.

Survey results indicate that a significant proportion of British Columbia adolescents consume substantial amounts of alcohol and have demonstrated some personal or social difficulties due to alcohol. For example, almost one-quarter (23.6 %) had been drunk at least once in the previous 4 weeks and almost one-third (32.0%) stated that they had 5 or more drinks on at least one occasion during this period. More than one in five adolescents (21.1%) had gone on a weekend drinking spree 3 or more times in their lives, 18.5 percent had demonstrated aggressive or destructive behaviour due to alcohol, and 12.2 percent had been warned by the police because of alcohol use. More than one in four adolescents (29.3%) reported that their parents do not know how much they drink.

The use of prescription depressants was relatively high among those surveyed and did not differ a great deal by gender, grade, or region. More than 15 percent of adolescents had used tranquilizers or barbiturates during the past year with a prescription or because a doctor told them to. Frequency of use is difficult to interpret because of the wording of the survey questions. For example, the response category "3 to 5 times" could mean 3 to 5 pills or 3 to 5 prescriptions and the quantity per prescription is not known.

Use of crack within the past year was reported by 1.6 percent of British Columbia adolescents. However, one in ten grade 12 adolescents reported that they had used cocaine during this period.

2. Individual Drugs

Following are highlights of survey results for individual drugs.

Alcohol

- The drug with the highest rate of use was alcohol, as 74.4 percent of adolescents stated that they had used alcohol within the past 12 months (those who only had a sip of alcohol are not considered to be users). About 60 percent of adolescents surveyed had used alcohol in the last 4 weeks and almost one in five reported drinking at least weekly.

- No substantial differences in the percentages of male and female drinkers were observed, although males were somewhat heavier and more frequent drinkers than females. Of the drinkers, 27.0 percent of males and 19.5 percent of females drank at least weekly during the past year.

- The percentage of drinkers and the amount consumed increased with grade. For example, 55.5 percent of those in grade 8 had consumed alcohol in the past year compared to 78.6 percent of those in grade 10 and 86.0 percent of those in grade 12.

- The percentage of adolescents who had consumed alcohol during the past year was lowest in the Lower Mainland region (67.7%). In other regions, the percentage of drinkers varied from 74.3 percent to 79.2 percent.

- The most frequently stated reason for trying alcohol was "to see what it was like" (45.3% of those who had tried alcohol). The most frequently stated reason for stopping alcohol use was "just experimenting with it and did not intend to use it again" (23.8% of those who stopped drinking); 13.0 percent stopped using alcohol because they believed it might be harmful to their health. One-third of those who continue to drink alcohol do so because "it is fun".

- 23.6 percent of adolescents stated that they had been drunk within the past 4 weeks (25.7% of males and 21.4% of females).

- 40.2 percent of adolescents stated that they had gone on a weekend drinking spree (been high or tight for most of Saturday or Sunday) at least once in their lives.

- 18.5 percent of adolescents stated that drinking alcohol had led to aggressive or destructive behaviour at least once in their lives and 12.2 percent of adolescents had been warned by the police because of alcohol use.

- 26.6 percent of those who drink do so at least occasionally when driving around or sitting in a car at night. Almost three-quarters (73.4%) drink at parties when adults are not present.

Tobacco

- Tobacco was used by 28.5 percent of adolescents within the last 12 months (those who only tried one cigarette are not considered to be users). About 20 percent of the smokers had more than 10 cigarettes daily during this period.

- More females than males used tobacco. For example, 31.9 percent of females smoked within the past year, compared to 25.0 percent of males. However, the heaviest smokers were male.

- The percentage of smokers and the amount smoked varied with grade. The lowest rates of use occurred in grade 8 and the highest rates occurred in grades 11 and 12. For example, 19.3 percent of those in grade 8 had smoked during the past year compared to 33.8 percent of those in grade 11.

- The percentage of cigarette users did not vary a great deal among regions, although the Central and South East region had a significantly lower rate of use within the past year (21.4%) than other regions. The number of cigarettes consumed by smokers was relatively consistent among regions.

Cannabis

- 30.0 percent of adolescents had used cannabis in the past 12 months and 19.3 percent had used the drug within the last 4 weeks.

- The percentage of adolescents who had used cannabis in the past year did not vary significantly by gender, as 31.1 percent of males had used the drug compared to 28.8 percent of females. Among users, males demonstrated a higher frequency of use. For example, 21.4 percent of male users had used cannabis 40 or more times in the past year, compared to 11.7 percent of female users.

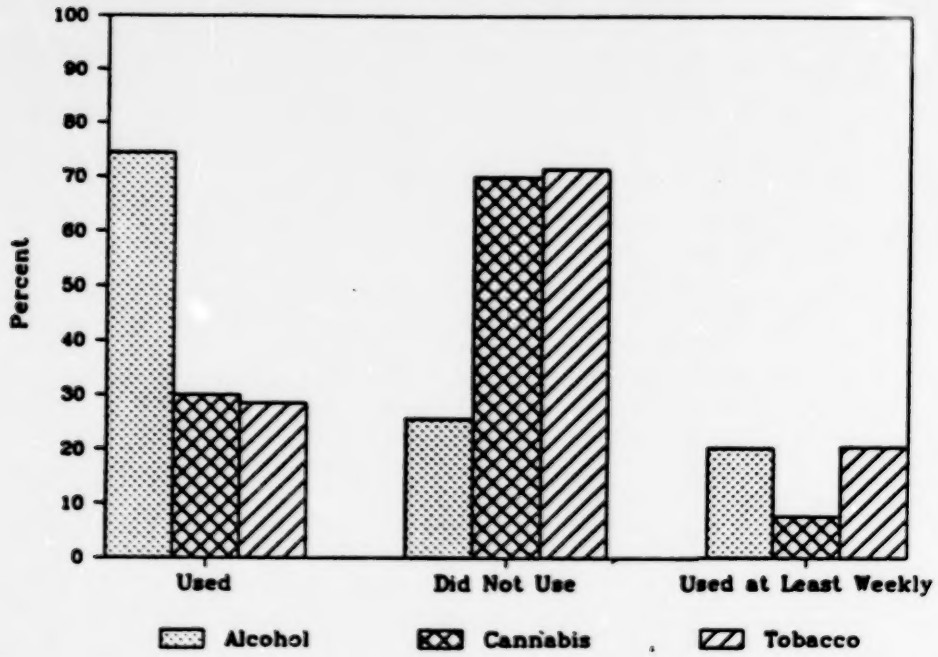
- The percentage of users increased by grade, as 12.9 percent of adolescents in grade 8 had used cannabis in the last year compared to 41.7 percent of adolescents in grade 12. The percentage of users almost doubled between grades 8 and 9.

- Some regional variation in cannabis use during the past year was observed. Both the North region (37.1%) and the Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and Powell River region (34.6%) had significantly higher percentages of cannabis users than the other regions of the Province. User rates in other regions varied from 26.7 percent to 28.8 percent.

- 52.5 percent of adolescents said that it was "fairly easy" or "very easy" to get cannabis. Ease of access to cannabis increased by grade.

- Among those who had tried cannabis, the most frequently stated reason for trying the drug was "to see what it was like" (59.7%). Those who stopped cannabis use did so for a variety of reasons including: "was just experimenting" (19.3%), "not interested in using it anymore" (20.3%), and "think it might be harmful to my health" (14.5%).

USE OF ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, AND TOBACCO BY BRITISH COLUMBIA ADOLESCENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



USE OF ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, AND TOBACCO BY BRITISH COLUMBIA ADOLESCENTS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY GRADE

			Grade				
		All	8	9	10	11	12
ALCOHOL	Drank	74.4	55.5	69.6	78.6	83.8	86.0
	Did Not Drink	25.6	44.5	30.4	21.4	16.2	14.0
	Drank at Least Weekly	20.3	10.6	15.5	19.3	25.8	31.8
CANNABIS	Used	30.0	12.9	24.2	32.3	40.6	41.7
	Did Not Use	70.0	87.1	75.8	67.7	59.4	58.3
	Used at Least Weekly	7.7	3.6	6.0	7.8	10.8	10.9
TOBACCO	Smoked	28.5	19.3	27.4	29.2	33.8	33.4
	Did Not Smoke	71.5	80.7	72.6	70.8	66.2	66.6
	Smoked at Least Weekly	20.5	12.9	19.3	20.3	24.7	26.0

Note: Drinkers exclude those who only had a sip of alcohol to see what it was like. Smokers exclude those who only tried one cigarette.

Hallucinogens

- Overall, 14.2 percent of adolescents had used some type of hallucinogen (e.g., LSD, PCP, magic mushrooms, mescalin) within the last 12 months.

- More males than females had used hallucinogens during the past 12 months (15.8% vs. 12.4%).

- The percentage of hallucinogen users increased by grade; 7.6 percent of grade 8 adolescents had used hallucinogens during the past year compared to 19.7 percent of grade 12 adolescents.

- The North region and Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and Powell River region had higher rates of use in the last 12 months than did other regions of the Province.

Other Drugs (Non-Prescription)

- Although 6.1 percent of British Columbia adolescents stated that they had used cocaine within the past year, very few (1.6%) stated that they had used crack within this period. Use of cocaine increased by grade, with the greatest rate of increase occurring between grades 10 and 11.

- The use of glue and solvents was relatively low, as 2.7 percent of adolescents had used glue and 3.8 percent had used solvents in the last 12 months. Overall, 4.9 percent had used glue or solvents. Use was highest among those in lower grades.

- 6.8 percent of respondents said they had used speed within the past year. However, no definition of the drug speed was provided in the questionnaire and it is possible that drugs other than methamphetamines were considered to be "speed" by adolescents.

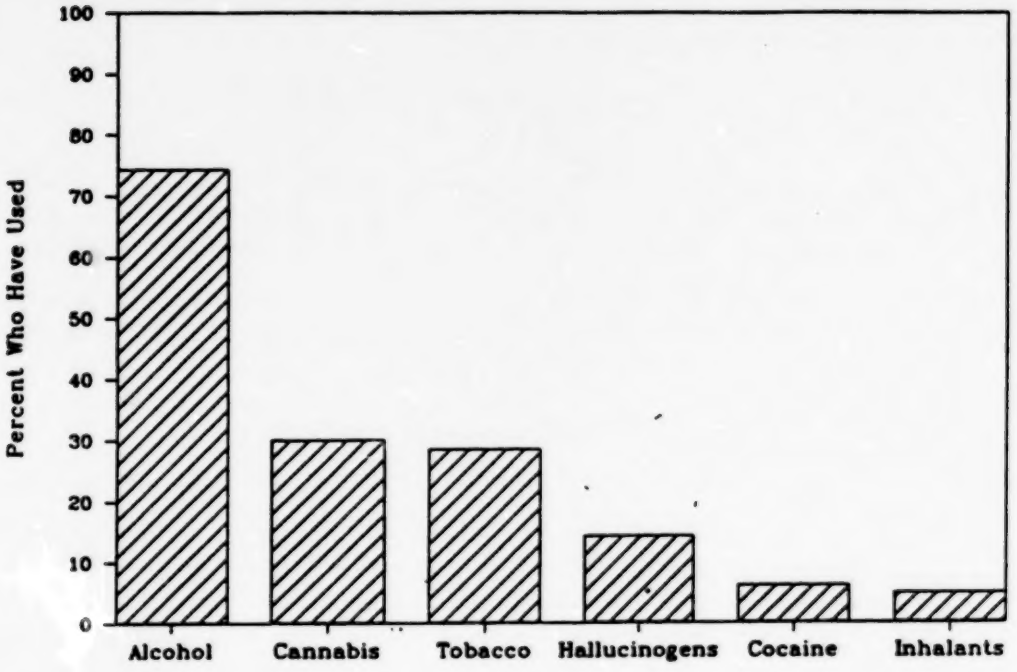
Prescription Drugs

- 6.3 percent of the British Columbia adolescents surveyed stated that they had used stimulants with a prescription or because a doctor told them to.

- A significant percentage of adolescents (11.3%) had used prescription barbiturates in the past year and 5.0 percent had used prescription tranquilizers.

- Overall, 15.1 percent of those surveyed had used prescription depressants (barbiturates or tranquilizers) in the last 12 months. Use was slightly higher among females than males (16.0% vs. 14.1%), but no consistent grade patterns were observed.

PERCENTAGES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE USED ALCOHOL OR OTHER SELECTED DRUGS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS



Note: Alcohol use excludes those who only had a sip of alcohol to see what it was like. Tobacco use excludes those who only tried one cigarette.

3. Comparisons with Other Provinces

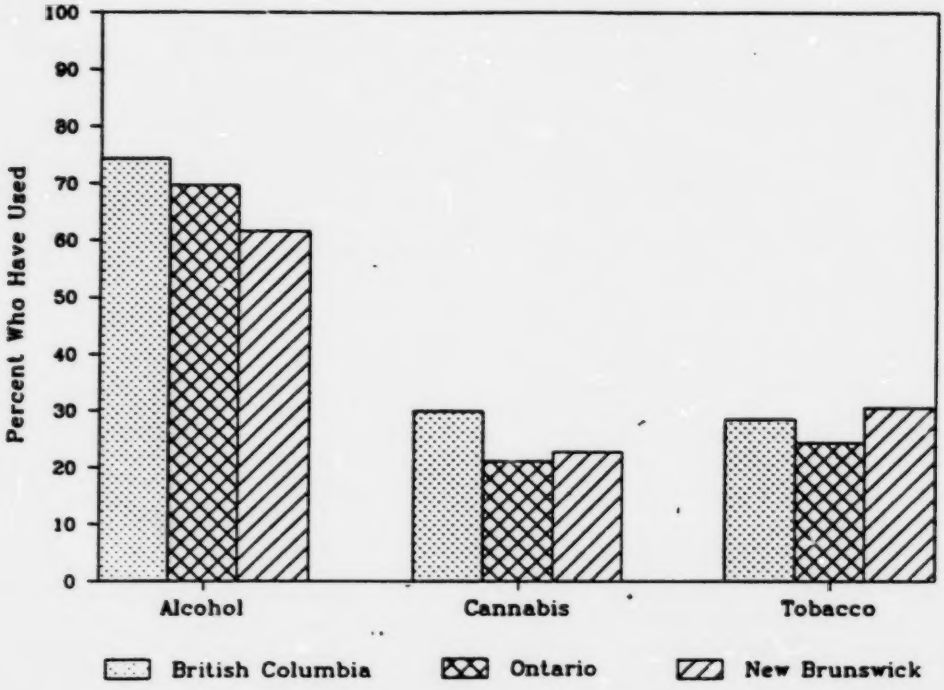
Recent surveys of adolescents using similar questionnaires have been conducted in two other provinces, Ontario and New Brunswick. A 1985 Ontario survey studied alcohol and drug use among adolescents in grades 7, 9, 11, and 13 of the regular school system. The Ontario survey is part of a continuing biennial series of surveys conducted by the Addiction Research Foundation. (Data from the 1987 survey were not available at press time). The New Brunswick survey, conducted in 1986 as a joint project of the Alcoholism and Drug Dependency Commission of New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Department of Education, involved students in grades 7 through 12 of the public school system.

There were some differences in survey design and sample composition among the three studies, but procedures were generally similar. It should be noted that the three surveys took place in different years (1985, 1986, and 1987) and this may affect the comparability of results. In all three provinces, the drugs that had the highest utilization rates were alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco. The following graph shows the percentages of adolescents in each province who used these drugs in the 12 months preceding the survey.

The percentages of adolescents who had smoked during the previous year did not differ substantially among provinces. New Brunswick had the highest percentage of smokers (30.6%) and Ontario had the lowest (24.5%). The percentage of drinkers was highest in British Columbia (74.4%) and lowest in New Brunswick (61.6%). British Columbia also reported the highest percentage of cannabis users (30.0%).

Although these surveys cannot be considered to be directly comparable, they do indicate that alcohol is the drug of choice for most Canadian adolescents and that significant percentages of adolescents in all three provinces use cannabis and tobacco.

PERCENTAGES OF ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE USED ALCOHOL, CANNABIS, OR TOBACCO IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS: BRITISH COLUMBIA, ONTARIO, NEW BRUNSWICK



Notes: The British Columbia survey (1987) included adolescents in grades 8 through 12 of the public school system. The Ontario survey (1985) included adolescents in grades 7, 9, 11, and 13 of the regular school system. The New Brunswick survey (1986) included adolescents in grades 7 through 12 of the public school system.

Alcohol use excludes those who only had a sip of alcohol to see what it was like. Tobacco use excludes those who only tried one cigarette.

1. Lower Mainland
2. Fraser Valley
3. Central and South East
4. Northern Region
5. Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands, and Powell River

Region One (Lower Mainland), includes Vancouver, North and West Vancouver, Sechelt, Burnaby, Richmond, Coquitlam, and South Delta:
Alcohol and Drug Programs
Regional Office
#1202 - 601 West Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 4C2
Phone: 660-6536 Fax: 660-6715

Region Two (Fraser Valley), covers the Fraser Valley and includes North Delta, Surrey, Maple Ridge, Hope, Mission, Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Langley, White Rock and New Westminster:
Alcohol and Drug Programs
Regional Office
#201 - 10090 - 152nd Street
Surrey, B.C. V3R 8X8
Phone: 660-8971 Fax: 660-8814

Region Three (Central and South East), includes the area boundned by the American border to the south, the Alberta border to the east, just south of Williams Lake to the north, and the Fraser Canyon to the west:
Alcohol and Drug Programs
Regional Office
532 Leon Avenue
Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 6J6
Phone: 763-9161 Fax: 861-7424

Region Four (North), covers the area from Williams Lake north to the Yukon border and west to Prince Rupert, and includes the Queen Charlotte Islands.
Alcohol and Drug Programs
Regional Office
280 Victoria Street, Room 619
Prince George, B.C. V2L 4X3
Phone: 565-6642 Fax: 565-6824

Region Five (Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands and Powell River), consists of Vancouver Island, the Powell River area, and the Gulf Islands.
Alcohol and Drug Programs
Regional Office
#20 - 5th Street
Nanaimo, B.C. V9R 1H7
Phone: 755-2311 Fax: 660-6625

Alcohol and Drug Programs
Provincial Youth Consultant
7-1 1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3C8
Phone: 387-1103 Fax: 387-6222